

## REDISTRIBUTION OF MILITARY FORCES IN ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

BY

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# USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Force structure transformation is a pillar supporting the Bush administration's defense policy and transitions US forces from a Cold War model to a 21st century one. The Pentagon has been pressing ahead with a program to overhaul the basing of US forces globally, using the Integrated Global Presence and Basing Strategy (IGPBS), a key part of the Global Posture Review (GPR). The 2004 IGPBS proposed the redeployment of 70,000 personnel to CONUS and a 30 percent reduction of overseas military bases. This requires an extensive redistribution of military personnel and a consolidation of military bases in the European and Pacific Commands. Germany has been the target for most of the cuts, 589 to 370 sites, while Korea's impact has been small. This paper reviews the Korean-US Alliance and presents an argument for redistribution of forces or, considering the recent Six party Talks regarding the stability in the region, a continuing need for US forces on the Korean peninsula which can also be used to deploy as for ground forces in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT).



## REDISTRIBUTION OF MILITARY FORCES IN ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

Our immediate challenge is to balance the current demand on the all-volunteer force with the need to transform and build readiness for the future.

—Army Chief of Staff,  
General George Casey<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

The intent and strategic guidance by President Bush has been clear--to be proactive in placing our efforts to preserve peace, maintain security and to be ready to take appropriate action against terrorism, anywhere in the world. President Bush provided the impetus to meet these challenges, as he summarized his National Security Strategy (NSS) in June 2002 when he stated, "If we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long. In the world we have entered, the only path to safety is the path of action. And this nation will act."<sup>2</sup> To do this, our military must be properly manned in a readiness posture to carry out the pre-emptive requirements associated with the National Security Strategy. Implementing guidance and operational concepts must be addressed in order to ensure the transition from a containment strategy around the globe to a strategy of pre-emption.<sup>3</sup>

The Army Chief of Staff, General George Casey has reiterated, "The US has been at war for over six years. Our Army—Active, Guard and Reserve—has been a leader in this war and has been fully engaged in Iraq, Afghanistan, and defending the homeland."<sup>4</sup> The US needs additional ground forces to effectively continue the fight in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). Almost 600,000 Soldiers are serving on active duty and over 250,000 are deployed to nearly 80 countries worldwide. General Casey also points out that the coming decades are likely to be ones of persistent conflict—



which will continue to challenge personnel manning as the Army will continue to have a central role in implementing the National Security Strategy (NSS) and must have available forces to meet the challenges. General Casey sums it up--While the Army remains the best led, best trained, and best equipped Army in the world, it is out of balance.<sup>5</sup> Transformational force structure and distribution change is needed.

As General Casey points out, the force inventory is being consumed as fast as the Army can man it, train it and build it into cohesive units. The Army's top priority over the next several years is to restore balance through four imperatives: Sustain, Prepare, Reset, and Transform. A high operational tempo and low personnel inventory have compounded the balance problem.

This paper addresses transforming distribution of forces in Korea and Japan to accelerate force structure for the deploying units with lower fill rates of combat personnel than ever in the GWOT. This, coupled with the requirements of multiple deployments, require additional military personnel to adequately provide readiness stability to the units. The requirements currently exceed the available Army inventory, and this is stressing the Army personnel manning system.

One area that is an issue is that of stabilization in overseas units. The Army is allowing its highly-valued personnel to extend in Korea using the Army's Incentive Program (AIP), a stabilization policy that offers bonus incentives for continued OCONUS tours of duty in Korea. These personnel are allowed to extend in Korea and Japan while the nation's fight is in Iraq and Afghanistan. The combat forces could be better distributed to units that are deploying. The Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) is safe, which offers the question of who has the real priority of fill for forces and why are units

still deploying under manned? The policy of extending Soldier's tour lengths and allowing additional dependent (accompanied family) tours in PACOM must be reexamined. The Army must restrict the AIP stabilization policy and redistribute its PACOM forces to meet the operational needs of the warfighting commanders.

The Army's plan to institute a troop surge to constitute GWOT units depends on having an available Army personnel inventory ready for assignment to these new units. With critical shortages in key military specialties such as Logistics, Aviation Maintenance, Ordnance, Military Police, Communications, Medical and Intelligence, the Army is standing up new Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) with considerable training and readiness risks. The Army personnel system has significant manning issues and this creates a need for units to rely on a cross-level of personnel process that further complicates the problem. Commands have been allowed to reassign personnel from the BCTs that have just returned from deployment which means that the life-cycle management process is by-passed, and impacts units as they start to prepare to train and reset for the next deployment cycle. The Army fills these surge units with a high density of Initial Entry Training (IET) personnel, which places a requirement for leaders to develop a competent war fighting unit. An option to consider would be to redistribute current forces that are in the Asian-Pacific Region.

### History of Korea-US Alliance

The history of Korea is important to review. *Transforming the ROK-US Alliance*, an in-depth study by ROK Army Colonel Sang Jo Jeon, chronicles the significant ROK developments since the 1990s.<sup>6</sup> The US National Security Strategy reinforces that the security of South Korea will be always be protected. The question that must be

readdressed is to what extent (for deterrence) are US forces needed in Korea and/or Japan to achieve this?

With the steady development of the ROK military, economic strength and diplomatic power, all indications are that South Korea has emerged as a formidable global power and can assume the lead in its national defense. The South Korean government has maintained an effective deterrence with North Korean leaders over the long run and maintained continued stability on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>7</sup> The time has come for South Korea to take the lead in its national security. Since the 1953 ROK-US Mutual Defense Treaty with Korea, which initially established over 300,000 US military personnel in Korea, US personnel numbers in Korea have steadily been reduced.<sup>8</sup> In 1955, the US reduced its forces to a single Army corps and in 1970, the US withdrew one of its Army divisions, in accordance with the Nixon Doctrine.<sup>9</sup> At the end of the Cold War, the US initiated a plan to reduce forces in the Pacific Theater in stages, but this initiative was put on hold when the North Korean nuclear issues arose in 1994.<sup>10</sup> In a recent speech by Song Min-soon, Korea's Minister of Foreign Affairs, the remarks (below, summarized) encapsulates the current view of the Korean government:

Following the 1953 Mutual Security Treaty, the US policy was to align the Korean economy with the Japanese and the US was committed to the defense of South Korea. It is important to recognize that South Korea is no longer the devastated, impoverished nation it was at the end of the Korean War. It has a large, capable military. It is properly seeking greater responsibility for its own defense. South Korea has upgraded the overall deterrent capabilities on the Korean Peninsula and in North Asia generally. South Korea will work to reduce and adjust the US military footprint in South Korea. The emergence of Japan, South Korea, and China as important players in global, as well as regional security, has been one of the welcomed international developments of recent years, and the extent of their contributions in the years to come can have a significant impact on the stability and prosperity of the Pacific in future decades.<sup>11</sup>

Today, the US interests in South Korea encompass numerous security, military, economic, and political concerns. Both the US and ROK remain fully committed to maintaining stability on the Korean peninsula. In November 2007, US Ambassador Vershbow reiterated the importance of the US-Korea Alliance:

Today's groundbreaking ceremony (at Camp Humphreys) is a testament to the enduring nature of our solemn commitment as allies to Korea. We celebrate years of hard work, wise planning, and close cooperation to build a stronger, better-equipped and mature alliance, one that will address the challenges ahead, particularly our common mission to secure lasting peace in Northeast Asia. Our joint efforts to transform and realign USFK, to implement the transition of wartime operational control, as well as Korea's own efforts to modernize its forces through the Defense Reform 2020 initiative, all serve to strengthen the combined deterrence and defense capabilities of this remarkable US-ROK Alliance.<sup>12</sup>

Ambassador Vershbow restated that the two countries' strong and successful security alliance would continue toward preserving peace on the Korean Peninsula and maintaining stability in the region.<sup>13</sup>

Also, during recent remarks to the Korean members of the American Chamber of Commerce in Seoul, he offered that South Korea has developed into the political and economic powerhouse that it is, today, through the continuing Future of the Alliance (FOA) agreements with the US.<sup>14</sup>

#### Current Political Situation in South Korea

This discussion is timely as Seoul newspapers recently published a speech by newly elected South Korean President, Lee Myung Bak, and offers the current government's stance on North Korea. The ROK government now views North Korea as a reduced threat to the security South Korea. Earlier this year, President Lee stated that he wants to "axe" the Unification Ministry, which handles relations with North Korea.<sup>15</sup> His presidential transition team now plans to streamline the government, and the

Unification Ministry is one of five ministries that would be closed down, merged or downgraded. The other four ministries his plan calls for restructure are: maritime affairs, information/communication, gender equality and science/technology. President Lee indicated that North Korea should be treated as any other foreign country, diplomatically, economically and militarily.

Seoul's latest move is another adjustment to the mode in which it interacts with its northern brother--an adjustment to better reflect how it sees the relationship between the two countries today. The relationship now is less about absorbing the North and much more about dealing and managing relations with the North and this move is a continuation of the evolving inter-Korean diplomatic relations.

President Lee's message is telling. He states the Korea-US Alliance is one of the most successful alliances in the post-World War era and that the alliance was a well-conceived strategic choice that *has* served the vital interests of the two countries. He says the alliance *has* also served as a stabilizing force for peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia. Korea and the US are now readjusting the military structure of the Alliance, including the transition of wartime Operational Control (OPCON) authority and are continuing in the consolidation of USFK bases on the peninsula.<sup>16</sup>

The readjustment of the ROK-US Alliance, once completed, would enable Korean forces to take primary responsibility for Korea's own national defense, while US forces will play a valuable supporting role. This effort will serve to strengthen the stabilizing role of the US forces play throughout the Northeast Asian region, with better force allocation and structure based on effects rather than mass stationing. President Lee's vision incorporates a stronger role by ROK forces and he believes the other

countries in the region would also be receptive to the vision.<sup>17</sup> South Korea would not be where they are today economically, politically and militarily if it had not been for the linked coordination between the US and Korea. In recent years, the governments have been in close consultation, tight in common stances, allowing no daylight between the Alliance's stance in negotiations concerning the North Korean nuclear issue.<sup>18</sup>

In the coming years, President Lee says the US-ROK Alliance must do five important things to maintain a strong alliance. First, he says the Alliance must continue to serve as a firm foundation for resolving the North Korean nuclear issue. Secondly, the Alliance must pave the way to establish a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. Thirdly, the Alliance must secure the continued role of the US as a stabilizer in the region, thus promoting common prosperity. Fourthly, the Alliance must be an essential element in building a regional security and cooperation mechanism and the fifth key to continued security is that the Alliance must promote universal values and enhance the cooperation on a range of global issues including counter-terrorism.<sup>19</sup>

The time is now to transform the force structure in the region and to make the security of the region align with a capability-based strategy. The Republic of Korea and the US are united and welcome diplomatic progress and force structure changes; the window of opportunity to change the relationship with North Korea is open.<sup>20</sup>

He summarizes with the following excerpt from his speech:

An important agreement was reached between President Roh and President Bush in Washington in September, 2006. The two presidents agreed to undertake a "common and broad approach" toward the North Korean nuclear issue, based on a shared vision for the future of the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia. Currently, North Korea promises to disable its major nuclear facilities and declare all of its nuclear programs by the end of the year.<sup>21</sup>

Likewise, inter-Korean relations are expanding and improving along with the denuclearization process, as witnessed at the inter-Korean Summit in Pyongyang early last month. Seoul and Washington share the view that negotiations can lead toward the establishment of a permanent peace regime on the Korean peninsula. The US is entering into unexplored territory of disabling nuclear programs by negotiation. The peaceful resolution of nuclear issues will also have significant bearings on global efforts for non-proliferation, including in the Middle East, an important precedent for the peaceful settlement of issues through negotiation.<sup>22</sup>

This effort will bring forth concentric circles of cooperation and harmony in the region, instead of a confrontational fault line. These circles will likely expand to the establishment of a peace regime on the Korean peninsula and then to the formation of a Northeast Asia multilateral security and cooperation dialogue.<sup>23</sup> The US considers political stability crucial to South Korea's economic development and in maintaining the security balance on the peninsula and most importantly, the preservation of peace in northeast Asia. A key factor in maintaining peace and stability in the region is keeping the Korean Peninsula free of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).<sup>24</sup>

### Summary of Country Strategies and Alliances in the Asia-Pacific Region

#### China

The region's most influential powers must be forefront in any discussion concerning change with implications for stabilization of the region—and any country which presents questionable security risks must be thoroughly assessed by US strategic decision makers. The first country to review is China. China's strategy in Pacific Region is not entirely clear. This is most concerning and will impact any decision to

redistribute US ground forces in PACOM. With uncertainty in what strategic moves China will enact, the security of the region is still in question. China continues with ramped up rhetoric concerning Taiwan and this is a huge concern to US policy makers as caution must be applied in making strategic placement of forces.

To counter that concern, a more optimistic view is to note that China has been actively pursuing a neighboring diplomacy aimed at cultivating cooperative relations with neighboring countries and regions. China is attempting to play a strong leadership role in forming an East Asian Community and led the first-ever East Asian Summit by urging for the creation of a free-trade area with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries and is actively engaging through diplomatic efforts to build a framework of strategic dialogue with major countries and regions. This may be the road to the future for Asia. The summit marked a significant step in the direction of establishing a region-wide community of East Asia, much like that of the European Union.

China's goal to cultivate a cooperative relationship with Japan in order to pursue productive neighboring diplomacy is gaining momentum.<sup>25</sup> In this context, China is seeking to break the prolonged deadlock in its relations with Japan, which are usually described as cold politically, yet warm, economically.<sup>26</sup> In April 2005, a series of anti-Japanese demonstrations took place in major Chinese cities including Beijing and Shanghai, and even though President Hu placed importance on China's relations with Japan, differences have surfaced within his administration reflecting the strong anti-Japanese public sentiment.<sup>27</sup> China's rapidly expanding arsenal of ballistic missiles and submarines has tilted the military balance between China and Taiwan in China's favor and has increased the tension to moving forward in negotiations.<sup>28</sup>



China's pace in the modernization of its military, the continuance of the Taiwan issue, and China's assistance in North Korea's nuclear development program is a major concern of the US. China also supplies North Korea with most of its energy through shipments of oil and coal, possibly providing as much as 80 percent of its energy needs.

On the positive side of diplomatic development, the US and China are strengthening their relations in areas of political, economic, and military cooperation. The relations between the two powers are improving and this offers support to the idea and concept that a redistribution of forces in PACOM is a viable option and presents the best opportunity for military force changes, than at any time in the past 50 years.

#### North Korea

North Korea is the center of attention in discussing peace and stability in the region. The issue of North Korea having a nuclear capability is the greatest concern to regional stability. The US position is that North Korea's nuclear problems should be resolved through a multilateral framework, such as the Six-party Talks (SPTs). These are a series of meetings between the six regional powers who can discuss the issues at hand and influence the right decisions to be made for the benefit of all. The SPT nations include The People's Republic of China, the Republic of Korea (ROK), the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), the US, the Russian Federation, and Japan. These talks began as a result of North Korea withdrawing from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 2003, and they began scheduled meetings in July 2005. The North Korean government tried originally to counterbalance the US by officially admitting to having nuclear weapons and then announced indefinite suspension of its participation in the SPTs, accusing the US of continuing its hostile policy toward

Pyongyang.<sup>29</sup> The US employed a “carrot-and-stick” diplomacy to coax North Korea to attend the SPTs, and as a result, other, non-nuclear, issues, such as the normalization of North Korea’s diplomatic relations with Japan and the US were agreed on.<sup>30</sup>

The US placed heavy financial sanctions on North Korea due to North Korea’s unwillingness to dismantle its nuclear weapons program. Also, China took financial actions such as freezing \$24 million North Korea assets in foreign bank accounts such as Macau’s Banco Delta Asia. UN sanctions, under UNSCR 1718, which was passed after the North Korean nuclear test on October 9, 2006, was a term of negotiation. The UN resolution included a ban on all luxury goods to North Korea. There are contentions and disagreements. These must be resolved and negotiations continued.

Members of the Six-party Talks have disagreed on forcing North Korea into a “verifiable and irreversible” disarmament. The US and Japan have demanded that North Korea completely dismantle its nuclear program so that it may never be restarted. North Korea wants the US to concede on some of the conditions before taking any weapons disarming action, as a guarantee to prevent a US attack on their country.<sup>31</sup>

The Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration, a foundation for diplomatic processes between Japan and North Korea, incorporates measures to resolve missile issues in addition to the nuclear problems and to normalize US-Korea relations.<sup>32</sup>

## South Korea

Previous ROK President, Roh Moo-hyun, instituted a concept called the Balancer of Northeast Asia Initiative where the National Security Council (NSC) of South Korea would play a role in persuading the US to pursue an accommodating diplomatic policy toward China. In this initiative, South Korea would act as a mediator

between the US and China. The discussions included the possibility of assigning a regional role in the Pacific Region to the US-ROK Alliance, which has been primarily focused on dealing with the threat of North Korea on the peninsula. Should this happen, South Korea would be in an agreement to cooperate with the US in deterring China, making it difficult for Seoul to be a mediator as envisioned in the Balancer Initiative. Seoul has discovered that being a regional political ally of the US is complicated and may not be as compatible with that of being a regional mediator.<sup>33</sup>

Dr. Bruce Bechtol, a regional strategist, presented compelling arguments that the US must take every measure to negotiate diplomatically and economically with North Korea. He concludes that if North Korea's leader Kim Jong-il fails to respond positively, reconciliation could go into reverse and another crisis, even war, could loom over the Korean peninsula. This would require US and ROK military commanders to cooperate closely in operational lanes of command, control, communications and intelligence (C4I). Dr. Bechtol offered, "The C4I infrastructure that the US brings to the Combined Forces Command (CFC) is irreplaceable and it would take at least eight or 10 years for the South Koreans to be able to do it."<sup>34</sup> This makes a strong argument that the ROK military is vulnerable and not yet in a position to separate itself from its dependence on US for military capability in the near term. The ROK military must be able to employ theater level Operational Control (OPCON) of C4I systems that are necessary to fight and win a war on the peninsula.<sup>35</sup>

South Korean military personnel must also incorporate an early warning notice and be poised to conduct an offensive strike to hold their own in a ground war with North Korea. South Korea is extraordinarily vulnerable to updated ballistic missiles that

the North Koreans could propel on the South Korea front lines and in densely populated cities. North Korea also has capability to employ 100,000 mobile special operations troops, capable of inflicting more than 200,000 casualties (projected) on Seoul on the first day of attack. The ROK military depends on an early warning of attack and preemptive measures to mitigate this from happening.<sup>36</sup>

## Japan

Defending Japan's mainland and islands still assumes top priority for the Japanese Self Defense Forces (SDF). It is inconceivable that a full-scale ground attack on Japan, a situation envisaged in the Cold War era, will ever be carried out. Rather, under the security environment now prevailing, there is a mounting necessity to provide protection against new, evolving threats such as a ballistic missile attack or an attack on Japan's offshore islands. Thus, the Japanese government has changed its force structure and resource-allocation priorities within the limits allowed by the nation's budgetary authorizations.

The new National Defense Program Guidance (NDPG) places an emphasis on cooperation by Japan as an ally the US and with the international community. In an ever changing, increased-globalized world, SDF must also expand and deepen its international cooperation and be prepared to deal with regional and global security problems. The new NDPG promotes this idea further.<sup>37</sup>

The Commander, US Forces, Japan (USFJ), and 5th Air Force, Lt. Gen Bruce "Orville" Wright, reaffirmed that the Japanese and US military forces are well postured to deter threats and protect common interests in Asia.<sup>38</sup> The road map for 2014

Realignment will remain essential to transforming regional US military presence for the long-term as it incorporates plans to strengthen alliance defense capabilities.

Japan's Air Self-Defense Force Air Defense Command and associated units will relocate to Yokota Air Base in fiscal year 2010 and new Air Operations Coordination Center at Yokota Air Base. The new center will serve as a hub between Japan and the US forces and will provide co-located air and missile defense coordination function. US Patriot PAC-3 capabilities also have been deployed to Japan within existing US facilities at Kadena air base on Okinawa and Japan plans to upgrade three additional Aegis ships by 2010 in steps to modernize its navy. .

As the USFJ and Japanese SDF improve their interoperability, training of SDF personnel and units in Guam, Alaska, Hawaii and the US mainland will be expanded. The National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) establishes the defense policy of Japan and sets strategic priorities. The new NDPG was revised to meet the challenges of the international situation with a regard to new threats in the 21st century and the challenges associated with the globalization of security.

## United States

The US is a very important ally and strategic power in the Asia-Pacific region but is militarily engaged in other parts of the world. The US national interests in the Asia-Pacific region are briefly summarized in the 2006 NSS. The strategic document offers strategic goals to provide a stable, peaceful and prosperous region based on free markets and free trade and to ensure a region poses no military threat against the US or the ROKUS Alliance.<sup>39</sup>

The US retains the right to wage preemptive attacks against countries or terrorist organizations that constitute a threat to its security. Under NSS guidance, the US will adjust its forces based on the Global Defense Posture Review (GDPR) in concert with its military strategies and will actively seek to deter nuclear development.<sup>40</sup>

The NSS offers clarity of US policy in the six party Talks by stating:

The US is actively participating in the Six-party Talk framework to maintain peace discussions and stability incentives in the region. The North Korean regime poses a serious nuclear proliferation challenge and presents a long and bleak record of duplicity and bad-faith negotiations. In the past, the regime has attempted to split the United States from its allies. This time, the United States has successfully forged a consensus among key regional partners – China, Japan, Russia, and the Republic of Korea (ROK) – that the DPRK must give up all of its existing nuclear programs.<sup>41</sup>

The US still plans to withdraw a third of its 37,000 troops stationed in South Korea over the next five years. This is one of the most significant realignment of US forces in PACOM in half a century. The withdrawal underscores a broader move by the Pentagon to transform its forces from traditional, fixed bases into more mobile forces for rapid global deployments.<sup>42</sup> Also, the US deployed 3,600 combat troops from South Korea to Iraq, the largest drawdown of American forces from Korea since the end of the Korean War. The planned reduction of 12,500 Soldiers from the peninsula over the next five years draws mixed reviews but generally viewed optimistically as a “win-win” situation for the US and South Korea.<sup>43</sup>

The American ground forces in South Korea are a viable force, currently consisting of approximately 18,500 personnel comprising elements of the US Army's 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division and are robust in structure and capability. The division has two ground maneuver brigades with two armored battalions, two mechanized infantry battalions, and two light infantry battalions, an aviation brigade with a cavalry squadron, an attack

air battalion, a lift air battalion, a division artillery (fires brigade element) which consists of four artillery battalions (two cannon battalions and two rocket battalions).<sup>44</sup>

## Russia

Russia is a very important strategic power in the Asia-Pacific region and a key player in maintaining peace and stability in the region. A close ally of North Korea for over 5 decades, Russia has favorable relations with both Koreas in terms of shared economic, political and strategic interests on the peninsula. Thousands of North Koreans are employed in Russia and trade relations are improving with several joint projects that will link Korea and Far East Russia. Natural gas exports to North Korea and the Trans-Siberian railroad are examples of increased economic ties.<sup>45</sup>

The Ministry of the Russian Federation for Antimonopoly Policy and Support to Entrepreneurship and Fair Trade Commission of the Republic of Korea (hereafter referred to as Parties), expressed the wish to promote co-operation and engagement in areas of mutual economic benefit.<sup>46</sup> The Parties have agreed to the following:

1. Promote and strengthen co-operation in the field of economic competition policy
2. Co-operation of mutual interests in:
  - improvement of legal framework on restrictive business practices, unfair competition; state antimonopoly control and regulation
  - exchange of technical experience in the field of investigation of cases, concerning the infringement of competition legislation
  - effective functioning of both product markets and stock markets

- Development of scientific and methodological basis for research in the fields of competition and advancement
- Organization of bilateral symposiums, conferences and seminars. Transfer of textual and academic information

Russia is highly concerned about the recent turn of events on the Korean Peninsula. A key motive behind Russia's approach, similar to those of China and South Korea, is to restrict thousands of North Korean refugees from flooding into its territory in the event of a collapse of the North Korean government or the initiation of military hostilities. Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly reiterated Russia's "steadfast and unchangeable" opposition to North Korea having nuclear weapons. However, Moscow favors negotiations to settle issues with North Korea.<sup>47</sup>

### The Real Threat from North Korea

North Korea threat assessments indicate the DPRK military is a credible force of approximately 1.2 million strong. North Korea has a small, but adequate coastal navy, and an air force capable of causing serious damage to Seoul with limited range into South Korea.<sup>48</sup> US intelligence reports indicate North Korea relies on large numbers of theater ballistic missiles for strength. North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile programs also threaten to destabilize a region that is in proximity to the world's largest economies. North Korea has sold ballistic missiles to several Middle Eastern countries, including Iran, and could proliferate nuclear weapons abroad. Estimates conclude that North Korea maintains 600 to 750 missiles capable of striking targets in South Korea and Japan and are capable of delivering chemical, biological, and nuclear payloads.<sup>49</sup> The missiles are kept in reinforced underground facilities and can be moved to disperse



firing points, making their detection very difficult.<sup>50</sup> According to US intelligence sources, Pyongyang has been flaunting its plutonium-based program but still denies having a uranium enrichment program, which creates additional concern over North Korea's nuclear development. To make matters worse, only Washington and Tokyo seem willing to press Pyongyang on the uranium issue.<sup>51</sup>

North Korea is believed to also have 500 to 600 SCUD missiles, developed in the 1980s, that can range targets 150 to 300 miles away. In 1993, North Korea started testing the No Dong missile with a range of 800 miles capable of reaching Japan and in 1998, they launched the first three-stage Taepo-Dong-1 missile over Japan. This missile achieved an operating range of about 1,250 miles. The second stage crossed over the Japanese main island of Honshu and landed in the Pacific Ocean and the third stage, detected weeks later by US intelligence agencies, fragmented and splashed down about 3,450 miles down range.<sup>52</sup>

North Korea's 1.2 million-man conventional force represents the third largest army in the world and could increase its fighting strength to over 8 million with reserves. The North Korean army has approximately 3,700 tanks and has an air force consisting of about seven hundred Soviet-built fighter jets (1960s era) that can range Seoul. North Korea also has a small, but historically aggressive navy.<sup>53</sup>

To augment its ground forces, North Korea maintains a large number of rocket launchers and cannon artillery near the DMZ, which are capable of delivering conventional, biological, and chemical munitions into Seoul.<sup>54</sup> North Korea depends on using an undetected quick strike and massing overwhelming forces to dominate the battlefield. The North Korean military has significant gaps in tactical communications

and battle field technology and there is a critical gap in equipment modernization of the North Korean military forces which is mainly due to the isolated and limited economy.

Significant shortages in fertilizer, fuel and modernized agriculture equipment have caused food shortages for the past 10 years in North Korea. International humanitarian assistance has helped the North Korean population survive large scale starvation, disease and health problems.<sup>55</sup> North Korea is faced with poor living conditions and malnutrition and North Korea's large scale military spending does not allow resources to be invested into the industrial base or for the welfare of the people.<sup>56</sup>

#### Military Capability of South Korea

The strength of the ROK defense structure resides in the combat power of their ground forces and modernized improvements to weapons platforms. The area needing most attention is for improvements to their command and control (C2) structure. This appears to be the foremost obstacle to ROK assuming USFK missions.

The US and ROK have completed most of the military transfer of operational missions from USFK forces to the ROK military and the final transition is on schedule.<sup>57</sup> The US-ROK hand off for the counter-battery fire mission against North Korean artillery units along the DMZ and the Joint Security Area (JSA) in Panmunjom will be in place soon. The multilateral training during the years of the alliance is paying dividends in this effort. There has been a seamless transition in the change of responsibility missions.

There are some capability improvements that need to be addressed in the transition. US forces rely on sophisticated command and control systems to integrate intelligence sensors, such as weapons locating radars, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and direct observation. Improvements in the area of command and control

systems must be made by the ROK military and investments in technology to improve ROK military command and control systems are essential to speed the transition from USFK to ROK responsibility and maintain the same readiness posture.<sup>58</sup>

South Korea relies upon its very formidable ground force to defend the peninsula. The ROK Army consists of three armies that share defense responsibilities on the peninsula. First ROK Army (FROKA), defends the eastern section of the DMZ, Second ROK Army (SROKA), is responsible for the defense of the rear area, Third ROK Army (TROKA), defends the western section of the DMZ and guards the three likely avenues of approach from the north. The ROK Army units consist of 11 corps, 50-plus divisions, and 20 brigades. Its 560,000 active duty army has 2,200 main battle tanks, 4,850 artillery pieces, and 2,200 armored infantry vehicles. The ROK can rapidly call up an additional 3.5 million ROK Army Reservists to augment the ROK active force.<sup>59</sup>

South Korea's economy is booming, with unprecedented growth and integration into the global information technology. South Korea has emerged into the top ten economic powers in the world and is ranked 12<sup>th</sup> in per capita and is over 20 times greater than North Korea's GDP.<sup>60</sup> South Korea has placed significant amounts of its economic resources toward the improvement of its military forces and has modern medical and training facilities and a modernization program for equipment. South Korea continues to invest its economic prosperity into its military modernization efforts.

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) data is useful to compare a country's economic strength. The GDP can be used to compare trends in military and defense spending. Using GDP data, North Korea ranks 98<sup>th</sup> in the world in GDP while South Korea ranks 11<sup>th</sup>. How does this relate to the military spending? The percent of the GDP

used by North Korea for its military is the highest in the world. Regional strategists say that North Korea's military expenditures are the basis of their internal problems.<sup>61</sup> In 2002, the North Korean government spent 33.9 percent of their GDP on the military. By comparison, ROK spent 2.8 percent of their GDP on their military while the US military spent 3.2 percent of their GDP on the military.

Although North Korea spends 33.9 percent of its GDP on the military, the ROK spends more on its military than all of the North Korean GDP. The ROK ranks eleventh in the world on defense spending, as shown in GDP data chart below.<sup>62</sup>

| <b>Country</b>       | <b>World Ranking</b> | <b>Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in US dollars (USD)</b> | <b>Military Expenditures -% of GDP (amount in USD)</b> |
|----------------------|----------------------|---|--|
| <b>North Korea</b>   | <b>98</b>            | <b>22,000,000,000</b>                                   | <b>33.9 (\$5,217,400,000-FY02)</b>                     |
| <b>South Korea</b>   | <b>11</b>            | <b>931,000,000,000</b>                                  | <b>2.8 (\$13,094,300,000-FY02)</b>                     |
| <b>United States</b> | <b>1</b>             | <b>10,400,000,000,000</b>                               | <b>3.2 (\$276.7 billion-FY99 est)</b>                  |
| <b>China</b>         | <b>2</b>             | <b>5,700,000,000,000</b>                                | <b>4.3 (\$55.91 billion-FY02)</b>                      |
| <b>Japan</b>         | <b>3</b>             | <b>3,550,000,000,000</b>                                | <b>1.0 (\$39.52 billion-FY02)</b>                      |

Table 1. GDP Table Comparison of GDP and Military Expenditures.<sup>63</sup>

This chart shows that South Korea has the necessary economic means to modernize, train and maintain a highly capable, modern military force. South Korea's defense budget is one of the largest in the world; a factor to consider for any adversary.

China's military spending bears watching as an exponentially large portion of its GNP go toward military modernization and this presents a great concern regarding stability in the region. The Korean peninsula is of vital strategic importance, base on

being geographically placed in the commercial sea routes and also economically. Not only do the international sea lanes route through the Korean waters, South Korea is close proximity with two of the world's largest economies, China and Japan. Thus, the US vital economic interests must be considered and appropriate forces must be postured to prevent catastrophic events that could disrupt global economics. The South Korean host nation support and the prepositioned war materiel in South Korea offer the best forward base logistics in the Pacific. This offers an argument for US forces to remain on the Korean peninsula; however, the US joint strike forces can be comprised of sea and air forces and that would constitute a quick strike force with a composition of forces to deter any aggressor. This will allow plans to continue for the redistribution US ground forces to continue.

#### Diplomatic Concerns and Issues

The South Korean people have voiced concerns and held protests and demonstrations in Korea regarding the US military presence in South Korea. A 2003 US State Department report indicated 59 percent of South Koreans answer affirmatively if they believe their country's relations with the US are poor and matches the data that show there has been a steady decline in favorable attitudes toward the US since 1995.

South Korea did provide ground troops to deploy in support of the GWOT effort in Iraq. This was a major show of strength to the US-ROK Alliance, a decision that was very unpopular with the Korean people. When polled to identify the top security concerns, South Koreans most often mention the American military presence and the US policy on the North Korea nuclear issue.<sup>64</sup>

Anti-American sentiment has been expressed in the form of demonstrations and rallies in South Korea. South Korean political groups have rallied for demands ranging from changes to the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) to total expulsion of US forces from South Korea. South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun won the South Korean presidential election with a soft stance anti-American campaign.<sup>65</sup>

Thomas Hubbard, recent US Ambassador to South Korea, addressed the growing anti-American sentiment by saying, "The future of the US-Korea Alliance will soon be in the hands of the new generation of Koreans and Americans."<sup>66</sup> This supports the idea that now the time to reduce the US ground forces and encourage less dependence by the ROK military on US military ground forces.

The push for the US to withdraw forces from South Korea is also gaining momentum in this country. Influential New York Times columnist, William Safire recently called for the military forces withdrawal "because the US does not want to appear as an imperialist power."<sup>67</sup> Also, conservative writer Doug Bandow of the Cato Institute has renewed his effort arguing that the US military forces should leave South Korea and isolationist Patrick Buchanan has also called on the US to break the alliance with South Korea.<sup>68</sup> Richard Halloran, a respected security strategist, offers five diplomatic options for the US to consider in negotiating a reduction of forces in PACOM:

- Seek to retain the *status quo* with cosmetic changes to appease critics.
- Move the headquarters of US forces
- Level up the US alliance with South Korea to that of the alliance with Japan.
- Continue to close and consolidate posts: may lead to a North Korean force reduction along the DMZ.

- Undergo a unilateral withdrawal of US forces and abrogate the security treaty between Washington and Seoul to force the responsibility for South Korea to defend the peninsula for themselves<sup>69</sup>

### Should the US Develop and Use a Preemptive Strike Option in the Asia-Pacific Region?

North Korean leader Kim Jong Il continues to pose concerns to US strategists by attempting to develop nuclear weapons, and long range missiles. The recent actions by the North Korea regime toward attaining nuclear weapons, developing advanced missile delivery systems, and then conducting recent long-range missile tests places them on the list for the US National Security Strategy pre-emptive strike option.<sup>70</sup>

The success of the three-stage No Dong missile program, to achieve additional range for its delivery capability, clearly demonstrated North Korea's desire to develop a weapon delivery system capability which can hit targets off the peninsula. Improved defense capability by USFK forces can be accomplished using systems such as the Patriot PAC-3 surface-to-air missiles and the Army's Stryker brigade on rotational basis. Also, the Navy's High-Speed Vessels and forward-deployment of additional air and naval assets to Hawaii and Guam will counter the threat. The Pentagon is planning an \$11B investment in 150 additional military capabilities over the next four years that will enhance the region's defense against a North Korea attack.<sup>71</sup>

North Korean's next-generation missiles could reach Hawaii, Alaska, and the US west coast.<sup>72</sup> This report, coupled with the North Korean proclamations of being capable "to rain fire on US cities,"<sup>73</sup> may enact a ROK-US pre-emptive strike option..

Successful pre-emptive strategic strikes would simultaneously eliminate the North Korean nuclear capability and greatly reduce North Korea's ability to barrage

Seoul with artillery, significantly destroy its missile program, and possibly unseat the current regime. Most strategists agree that a preemptive strike could set the conditions for a swift ROK victory, save thousands of lives, and result in a reunited Korea.

The US and ROK agree that pre-emptive strike into North Korea must be done unilaterally. Otherwise, the US would be seen as the aggressor. Seoul and Washington must keep planning to reduce the visibility and "footprint" of US forces in Korea because of increased negative public opinion concerning the USFK presence. Moving the US Army out of Seoul, reducing troop levels and consolidating bases will quell the demands from the Korean society who want US troops off the peninsula.<sup>74</sup>

A key argument for not exercising a pre-emptive strike option is that a large number of North Korean casualties will result from such an assault. Also, any failure of the strategic targeting would trigger military counter strike retaliation into Seoul, which has population of over 20 million and well within North Korean artillery range. Estimates on casualties in a current Korean War scenario (where Seoul was under an artillery barrage), forecasts over 1 million non-combatant casualties-with over 50,000 of those being American.<sup>75</sup>

A more viable option might be a well-planned and integrated redistribution of the US ground forces from South Korea, with a rotational joint force structure established consisting predominantly of US Air Force and US Navy Strategic Strike Forces. Options would include placing the naval forces in the Inchon or Pusan port areas and increase the US air strike forces, using rotational units. These measures will offer a reduced visibility of US forces on the Korea peninsula. Most strategists agree, in the event of an



attack by North Korea, ROK military forces, with assistance from US Navy and US Air Force assets on the peninsula, in a joint force structure, could defeat the attack.<sup>76</sup>

### Time to Withdraw from Korea

In the book, *Tripwire: Korea and US Foreign Policy in a Changed World*, Cato Institute columnist Doug Bando points out that it is time to recognize that South Korea is capable of defending itself and the time is right to bring American ground forces home.<sup>77</sup> With the Cold War long over, there is no longer the need for US “tripwires” in Korea. In 1953, the ROK was war ravaged and ruled by an autocrat whose belligerence helped plunge the country into a disastrous war. Without an American security guarantee, South Korea would not have survived. Four-plus decades later, South Korea is prosperous, democratic and a regional leader while its adversary to the north is ruled in isolation. The North Korean government seeks avoiding absorption by Seoul and protection to maintain the regime.

It is generally accepted by most strategists that Washington's military commitment to South Korea has outlived its usefulness. Also, South Koreans are increasingly voicing opposition to American forces in Korea. After World War II, the US emerged as the leader of the 'free world' and the only power strong enough to contain the Soviets, which was the primary reason for having US forces based in Korea.<sup>78</sup>

The Six-party Talks represents a significant diplomatic achievement and if all agree to institutionalize the talks on a regularly scheduled basis, an important diplomatic breakthrough in the region would be in place..

In these meetings, the US has been crystal clear about what constitutes ultimate success: “the complete, 100 percent verifiable, irreversible dismantlement of North

Korea's nuclear weapons programs." However, most strategic experts seem to agree that this pronouncement is "unachievable." No arms control agreement has ever been "irreversible" nor can any verification plan achieve 100 percent reliability.<sup>79</sup>

North Korea has most recently offered to freeze its nuclear weapons and its nuclear energy efforts. Pyongyang's demands in return are that the US must take it off the "list" as a sponsor of terrorism, lift the US political, economic and military sanctions, blockade and freely supply oil, power and other energy resources to the DPRK. Most experts say these demands are politically impossible for the US to accept.

### Recommendations

There are two recommendations: The first is that the Army should conduct an immediate redistribution (Summer 08-Fall 08) to incorporate a 25 percent reduction of ground forces in Korea and Japan, in conjunction with the Joint Forces Global Force Distribution. This strategic decision will be advantageous to the Army's Life Cycle management in planning for unit fill of forces deploying to GWOT operations.

A second recommendation is to incorporate a DoD plan to fill the gap in the region by establishing a Joint Strategic Strike Force of Navy or Air Force assets. This will allow a long term strategic plan to be developed that will ensure the capability is established for tactical and strategic dominance by Navy and Air Force assets in the region. This strike force would constitute a viable rapid strike capability which would counter any offensive action envisioned by North Korea.

Redistribution of 25 percent (or more) of the US ground forces from Korea and Japan will also help ease the anti-American diplomatic tension in Korea and Japan.

Most importantly, this recommendation will provide a significant contribution to help with the Army surge will immediately impact the readiness of warfighting units.

### Conclusion

There has been much discussion on the need for US ground forces in Korea and Japan and is a continuing DoD issue under review on Capitol Hill. This month, General Burwell B. Bell, USFK Commander, testifying before Congress, revalidated the Alliance mission and clarified the progress being made in the peninsula-wide relocation efforts. His remarks to Congress are closely monitored in Korea and Japan and his statements to Congress counter the criticism from South Korean civic groups, such as the People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy, who have criticized the South Korean Ministry of National Defense (MND) for the costs of these moves and have demanded disclosure on who is paying the for the relocation costs and environmental purification expenses.<sup>80</sup>

In summary, America's commitment to South Korea's security is as strong as ever. As Peter Brookes astutely points out, the real "tripwire" is the treaty, not the number of US troops in South Korea.<sup>81</sup> South Korea's full acceptance of responsibility to protect its homeland and continuance of the Six party Talks, will enable the US to maintain its strategic objectives in northeast Asia and allow the Army to be in a position to redistribute its ground forces as needed. This will provide the personnel to fill the Army's war fighting units and help constitute a fresh rotation of personnel for the continued deployments in a high tempo GWOT.

## Endnotes

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<sup>12</sup> US Ambassador Vershbow 's speech delivered at CP Humphreys in December, 2007, Camp Casey, Korea. , Ambassador Vershbow offers the ROK senior military leaders, community leaders of the Pyeongtek, Korea, community and various senior U.S. military leaders his perspective on the U.S.-ROK Alliance in this speech, saying that peace on the Korean Peninsula is viewed as vital to the peace and stability of Northeast Asia. He surmises that plans are well underway to consolidate strategic defense structures and emphasized this fact during the USFK relocation ceremonies at Camp Humphreys. He commended the dedicated US service members presently on duty in South Korea and emphasized that the purpose of the

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>37</sup> Japan National Institute for Defense Studies, "Japan-Toward More Effective International Cooperation," in *East Asian Strategic Review 2006* (Tokyo: Japan National Institute for Defense Studies, 2006), 234-235; available from [http://www.nids.go.jp/english/dissemination/east-asian/pdf/2006/east-asian\\_e2006\\_08.pdf](http://www.nids.go.jp/english/dissemination/east-asian/pdf/2006/east-asian_e2006_08.pdf); Internet; accessed 11 March 2008.

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<sup>74</sup> Brookes.

<sup>75</sup> Arnoldy.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Doug Bandow, *Tripwire* (Washington, D.C.: Cato Books, 1996), 6-11; available from [http://www.cato.org/pubs/policy\\_report/v18n4-7.html](http://www.cato.org/pubs/policy_report/v18n4-7.html); Internet; accessed 16 November 2007.



<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>80</sup> General Burwell B. Bell, US Army, Commander, USFK, Commander's testimony before Congress, 17 March 08, as reported by *Seoul News*, from *Seoul News* source, trans. by Mr. Hubert Huh, USFK Forces Integrator, Seoul, Korea, emailed to author, 18 March 2008; Hubert Huh email via byungyook@hotmail.com Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Brookes, 2